

Consul-General of Japan in Sydney's Newsletter

No. 63 New Cabinet of the Northern Territory, and the Fujita Family

21 June 2022



**Meeting with the Fujita Family at Darwin Memorial Uniting Church
(6 June 2022)**

The 21 May federal election resulted in the formation of a new Labor Party government. In the Northern Territory, almost 2 weeks earlier on 10 May, on the birth of his second child, then Chief Minister Michael Gunner announced his resignation from the post, and on 13 May, new Chief Minister Natasha Fyles was sworn in. To coincide with the first post-COVID visit by the Fujita Family, who have contributed to post-war reconciliation through exchange with Darwin Memorial Uniting Church, I visited Darwin from 6 to 8 June and met with Chief Minister Fyles and the Fujita Family. In this issue of my newsletter, I would like to report on the outcomes of my eighth visit to Darwin.



Meeting with NT Chief Minister Fyles (7 June)

- **Meeting with NT Chief Minister Fyles**

On 7 June, I met with the Hon. Natasha Fyles, Chief Minister of the Northern Territory. I had frequently heard her speak in her previous capacity as NT health minister and also spoken with her in her capacity as tourism minister, but it was my first time to meet her in person.

Born in Darwin, after working as a primary school teacher, she was first elected as a member of the NT Parliament in 2012. From 2016, under Chief Minister Gunner, she held various important ministerial portfolios including attorney-general, justice minister and health minister.

During our meeting, I explained that Japan and the NT have extensive ties, including history and exchange, business and security. We were also able to have a fruitful exchange of views about continuing and strengthening our strategic partnerships in various fields and developing new opportunities for cooperation.

That very evening, [Chief Minister Fyles' Facebook](#) posted a photo and message about our meeting – I felt again her energetic approach to work. I shared her post to [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) adding my own message.



Meeting with NT Minister for Multicultural Affairs Ah Kit
(7 June 2022)

● **Meeting with NT Minister for Multicultural Affairs Ah Kit**

Also on 7 June, I had a meeting in the evening with the Hon. Ngaree Ah Kit, NT Minister for Multicultural Affairs. After many years working in suicide prevention for Indigenous peoples, Minister Ah Kit was first elected to the NT Parliament in 2016. When I visited Darwin in February this year to participate in a series of events commemorating the 80th anniversary of the Bombing of Darwin, as then Speaker of the House, the Hon. Ah Kit led proceedings when Ambassador Yamagami gave his address to the NT Legislative Assembly.

With the recent inauguration of the Fyles Government, she assumed her first ministerial position. As Minister for Multicultural Affairs, the Japanese community in the NT falls within her jurisdiction, and so, I requested a meeting with her. Minister Ah Kit also has responsibility for international education and digital development, and we were able to have a valuable exchange of views about cooperation with Japan in each of these fields.

I also took the opportunity to ask Minister Ah Kit about issues facing Indigenous peoples which she is involved in. Nationally, the Northern Territory has a particularly high proportion of Indigenous Australians who face various challenges such as security, family issues and employment, and initiatives to address these challenges are underway. I felt Minister Ah Kit's passion during these discussions, and I learnt many things, including that rather than imposing solutions and strategies, above all it is important to listen to and work alongside communities.



With representatives of the Fujita Family and Darwin Memorial Uniting Church
(6 June 2022)

● Meeting with the Fujita Family

On the previous evening (6 June), I met members of the Fujita Family for the first time in person at the Darwin Memorial Uniting Church.

After the war, Fujita Salvage Company was engaged to raise and remove sunken vessels that were impeding navigation within Darwin Harbour, and the company carried out the work from 1959 to 1961. The CEO of the company, Mr Fujita Ryugo, strove for reconciliation between Japan and Australia, and when the Darwin

Memorial Uniting Church was established in 1960, he donated 77 crosses made of metal salvaged from the wreckage. From then on, Darwin Memorial Uniting Church and the Fujita Family engaged in long-term, ongoing exchange, and in doing so fostered Japan-Australia reconciliation.

Visiting from Japan on this occasion were Mr Fujita Ryugo's son, Mr Fujita Senichiro, and the latter's daughter, Ms Fujita Yoshiko. At the time of the salvage work in Darwin Harbour, Fujita Senichiro was 26 years old and he was responsible for the oxygen required to cut up the sunken vessels. When he returned to Japan, he established an oxygen business in his hometown of Matsuyama City. Fujita Yoshiko did student exchange in Sydney as a 16-year-old in the 1980s, and she visited Darwin to trace the footsteps of her grandfather.



The ship propeller that had marked the Fujita Family grave in Japan standing in front of Darwin Memorial Uniting Church (6 June 2022)

Later, after the Fujita Salvage Company donated documents to the Library & Archives NT in 2009, exchange between the Darwin Memorial Uniting Church and the Fujita Family became particularly active. Members of the family visited to

participate in the 50th anniversary event marking Darwin Memorial Uniting Church's foundation and visited again in 2013, 2017 and 2019. On the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the Bombing of Darwin, a ship propeller, which had marked the Fujita Family grave in Japan, was donated to the church where it stands today in front of the church building. The original information panel explaining the propeller had become difficult to read due to wear and tear, and recently it was renewed.

Hearing the histories of the 77 crosses and the propeller directly from representatives of both the Fujita Family and the Darwin Memorial Uniting Church, I could really appreciate their more than 60 years of reconciliation and exchange. I hope this exchange will develop even further in the future.



With Australian-Japanese Association of the NT (AJANT) committee members
(6 June 2022)

- **Exchanging views with the Australian-Japanese Association of the NT (AJANT)**

Also during this trip, I met and exchanged views with members of the [Australian-Japanese Association of the NT \(AJANT\)](#) committee. I expressed my gratitude for

AJANT's efforts that led to the erection of the memorial to the I-124 in February this year on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the Bombing of Darwin.

AJANT has organised Japanese cultural events in Darwin over many years. This year, they are preparing to hold the Darwin Japan Festival in early November. I would like to do my best to plan my business trip to Darwin to coincide with that event to support their efforts.

As I mentioned to Chief Minister Fyles, Japan and the NT have extensive ties, including through history and exchange, and in business and security. It is important that we continue to develop the ties we share across all fields into the future. Meeting with the new Chief Minister and Minister for Multicultural Affairs and having the first in-person meeting with the Fujita Family was a step in this direction. I will continue to work for the steady development of relations between Japan and the NT. Your warm support to this end would be greatly appreciated.

Kiya Masahiko, Consul-General of Japan in Sydney